

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 48

By Woodson

A RESOLUTION to honor and recognize Mary Costa of Knoxville,  
for her distinguished musical career and her  
outstanding service to the State of Tennessee.

WHEREAS, Tennessee has a rich musical history and Tennesseans hold those individuals that possess tremendous musical gifts in high esteem, as a multitude of her gifted sons and daughters have won national and international acclaim as legendary musicians, songwriters, and performers; and

WHEREAS, one such individual is Mary Costa of Knoxville, an internationally acclaimed operatic soprano who, during her legendary career, gave stellar performances with every major opera company in the world in addition to being beloved by multiple generations of fans as the voice of Princess Aurora in the classic Walt Disney film, "Sleeping Beauty"; and

WHEREAS, Mary Costa was born in Knoxville, Tennessee, in 1930, and as a young teenager moved with her family to Los Angeles, California, where she completed her high school education; and

WHEREAS, a gifted young singer, upon graduation Ms. Costa entered the Los Angeles Conservatory of Music to study with famed maestro Gaston Usigli; between 1948 and 1951, she appeared with Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy on Mr. Bergen's highly popular radio show and sang with Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis at concerts at UCLA as well as made commercials for Lux Radio Theatre; and

WHEREAS, in 1952, the legendary Walt Disney selected Mary Costa to be the speaking voice and singing voice of Princess Aurora in the Disney film "Sleeping Beauty," which quickly became a beloved classic upon release, after seven years in production; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Costa's star continued to rise as, in 1958, she was called upon to substitute for Elisabeth Schwarzkopf at a gala concert at the Hollywood Bowl. Receiving glowing reviews, she was invited to sing the lead in her first staged operatic production, "The Bartered Bride," produced by renowned German producer, Carl Ebert, for the Los Angeles Guild Opera; and

WHEREAS, that triumph was followed by a stunning debut at the Glyndebourne Festival and her selection by the legendary Leonard Bernstein to perform the lead role for his "Candide," which toured both in the United States and London; and

WHEREAS, gaining greater visibility as a new soprano on the rise in 1959, Mary Costa made an impressive appearance at the Vancouver Festival, was engaged by the San Francisco Opera for several productions, winning much acclaim, and signed an exclusive contract with impresario Sol Hurok, who would remain her manager until his death; and

WHEREAS, 1961 would see Mary Costa make an appearance at the Royal Opera House in London's Convent Garden singing "La Traviata," and she would record "La Boheme" for RCA Victor, which was later re-mastered and re-released on CD in 1998, having become a much-utilized recording by a number of leading music schools across the country; and

WHEREAS, Mary Costa made her debut with the Metropolitan Opera in 1964, receiving a tremendous ovation for having given what is considered by many to be one of the most outstanding debuts of an American singer in the history of the company; and

WHEREAS, she would go on to perform many seasons with the Met, playing lead roles including Massenet's "Manon," her favorite role, and was selected to recreate the title role of "Vanessa" in a new production; Jacqueline Kennedy was in attendance for the opening night gala and personally offered backstage congratulations; and

WHEREAS, invited to London in 1964, Ms. Costa filmed three acclaimed productions for the BBC, "La Traviata," "Faust," and "The Merry Widow," which thrilled British critics and have continued to be re-broadcast in the United Kingdom on a regular basis; and

WHEREAS, other career highlights include being chosen by Igor Stravinsky for the San Francisco Opera's production of "The Rake's Progress," with private vocal coaching by Maestro Stravinsky, the world premier of Norman Dello Joio's "Blood Moon," touring Russia with the

Bolshoi Opera in 1970 to overwhelming success, and performing in the Western Hemisphere production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream"; and

WHEREAS, with a repertoire that included forty-four opera roles, Mary Costa was personally requested by Jacqueline Kennedy to sing for the John F. Kennedy Memorial Service and was invited by President Richard Nixon to perform at the White House at a state reception for the Prime Minister of Singapore in 1974; and

WHEREAS, the 1970s also saw Ms. Costa sing the lead in a revival of "Candide" at the newly opened Kennedy Center in Washington at the request of Leonard Bernstein, join the Metropolitan Opera on its historic tour of Japan, and she was nominated for a Golden Globe in 1972 for her work in the feature film, "The Great Waltz"; and

WHEREAS, her television appearances include Bing Crosby's Christmas Show, Frank Sinatra's "Woman of the Year," the NBC Follies, and the Academy Awards; as well as shows hosted by Jim Nabors, Johnny Carson, Merv Griffin and Dinah Shore, to name but a few; and

WHEREAS, taking a sabbatical from the opera stage in the 1980s, Ms. Costa became highly involved in the Palm Beach Opera and served as a consultant and advisor to aspiring singers there before relocating to her hometown of Knoxville in 1993; and

WHEREAS, an Honorary Lifetime Member of the Board of the Knoxville Opera Company, she has served as an advisor to the board and as a mentor to young performers at the University of Tennessee School of Music; and

WHEREAS, no stranger to awards or accolades, Mary Costa has been awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Music from Hardin-Simmons University, an Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts from Carson-Newman College, and the coveted Disney Legends Award, listed in the *Marquis Who's Who in America* and selected as Tennessee Woman of Distinction by the American Lung Association; and

WHEREAS, presented the prestigious Tennessee Achievement Award by Governor Don Sundquist, Mary Costa received an Honorary Award for Musical Achievement from the Los Angeles Guild Opera and has been inducted into the Knoxville Opera Hall of Fame, and she continues to share her time and advocacy for the company both at the state and national level; and

WHEREAS, in 2001, Ms. Costa was one of thirty-eight honorees chosen by the Metropolitan Opera Guild for Distinguished Verdi Performances of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries; and

WHEREAS, a National Ambassador for Childhelp USA, Mary Costa has also helped raise funds for Read Across America, Signal Centers of Chattanooga, and ChildHelp USA with the help of the Disney Corporation as she continues to assist children in need; and

WHEREAS, in 2003, Mary Costa was nominated by President George W. Bush to serve on the National Council of the Arts and following her confirmation by the U.S. Senate was sworn into office by Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor; and

WHEREAS, we wish to grasp this golden opportunity to specially recognize this beloved daughter of Tennessee whose musical gifts that have made her one of the most successful and renowned American talents in the history of opera are only exceeded by her exemplary efforts on behalf of children in need in Tennessee and across this great nation; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED SEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we honor Mary Costa of Knoxville for her outstanding musical contributions to the world, commend her many charitable endeavors on behalf her fellow Tennesseans, and salute her sterling example of living the examined life with courage and conviction as we extend to her our best wishes for much continued success in all her future endeavors.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.